

DISCOURSE OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN INDONESIA*

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ABSTRACT

In Indonesia, which is a multi-cultural and multi-religious country, inter-group conflicts frequently take place in religious forms and colours, or involve religious issues directly. Many, accordingly, have attempted to propose the concept and theory of “religious pluralism” in order to provide a peaceful and humane solution to the problem.

Soeharto’s government has been regarded as the most systematic and successful institution in dealing with religious conflicts. At least, it managed, to a large extent and by any means, to control and to stop these conflicts from bursting. However, as soon as this regime collapsed in 1998, the religious conflicts came into existence on a large scale in different parts of the country, such as in Moluccas and Poso, Eastern Indonesia. Therefore, in the era of “reformation”, the discourse of religious pluralism gains currency – and moral acknowledgement – more than before, within the different levels and circles of society in Indonesia.

A. DEFINING RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Today, “religious pluralism” is among the most popular terms in the world in general, and in Indonesia in particular. Yet hardly can we find any one who tries seriously to define the term with an adequately clear meaning. It seems that the term is used as if all had accepted it unanimously, and hence, it is *taken for granted*.

So far as my humble reading on the subject matter can trace, it is only John Hick who really takes the issue seriously. He has attempted painstakingly to define the term substantively and sophisticatedly by articulating the issue extensively and argumentatively.¹ In his book, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, Hick puts it as follows:

Stated philosophically...pluralism is the view that the great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real or the Ultimate from within the major variant cultural ways of being human; and that within each of them the transformation of human existence from

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¹ Most of Hick’s works are mainly dedicated to elaborate his hypothesis of religious pluralism directly or indirectly.

self-centredness to Reality centredness is manifestly taking place – and taking place, so far as human observation can tell, to much the same extent.”²

It is obvious that, based on Hick’s definition above, there is no essential and fundamental difference among the world religions. And thus, according to him, “the great religious traditions are to be regarded as alternative soteriological “spaces” within which, or “ways” along which, men and women can find salvation/liberation/fulfillment.”³ All religious traditions are considered as valid, for they are actually different forms of human responses to the same ultimate transcendent reality,⁴ and hence, they are “authentic manifestations” of the Real.⁵ In short, all religions are the same in relativeness, and no religion has any right to claim for *uniqueness of truth and salvation*.

As generally well-observed, the hypothesis of religious pluralism has been developed and introduced, or even imposed, elsewhere in order to replace the predominant religious attitudes of divergent followers of religions of the world towards each other, which have been commonly and rightly characterized as mutually exclusive, or at best, inclusive. These two paradigms are currently considered by the modern pluralist minds as obsolete and not conducive to the process of democratization and globalization.

This paper is an attempt to examine critically the discourse of religious pluralism in Indonesia, focusing on the philosophical and ideological root of the discourse, and on its early and later development, the emerging debate on it, and on how it is currently viewed in the context of Indonesian interest.

B. INCEPTION OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN INDONESIA

The discourse of religious pluralism in Indonesia can be at least traced back to the early beginning of the Indonesian independence period, or while the blueprint for the state’s basic constitution was being shaped. By the time of the Declaration of Independence on August 17, 1945, which gave birth to Indonesia as a political entity, this country formally emerged as a constitutional state based on a national ideology (though, then, unanimously considered as

² Hick, John, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1985), p. 36. A similar definition also can be found in his article, ‘Religious Pluralism,’ contributed to *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. It reads:

...the term refers to a particular theory of the relation between these traditions, with their different and competing claims. This is the theory that the great world religions constitute variant conceptions and perceptions of, and responses to, the one ultimate, mysterious divine reality...the view that the great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real or the Ultimate, and that within each of them independently the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness is taking place. [Hick, John, ‘Religious Pluralism,’ in Eliade, Mircea (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 12, p. 331].

³ -----, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 36-7; and -----, ‘Religious Pluralism,’ p. 331.

⁴ -----, *The Fifth Dimension* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), pp. 10, 77-79.

⁵ -----, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (London: Macmillan, [1989] reprinted 1991), p. 247.

provisional and temporary)⁶ called *Pancasila* (Five Principles): (1) Belief in One Supreme God, or Monotheism; (2) Just and Civilized Humanism; (3) the Unity of Indonesia; (4) Democracy under the Guidance of Wisdom through the Deliberation of the People's Representatives; and (5) Social Justice.

It is an observable fact that Indonesia, though Muslims are predominant in terms of number, has never been an Islamic state, and that its government has never been in the hands of leaders determined to identify the state with Islam. It is true, that there have been serious attempts from the Islamic-oriented leaders of different Islamic parties since the independence of the country till the present day, to struggle constitutionally for the implementation of Islamic *shari'ah* law, but they have always been destined to fail to win extensive electoral support either in the House of Parliament (DPR/MPR) or in the general elections. They even failed to introduce Islamic *shari'ah* law to be implemented though exclusively on the Muslim community, let alone the whole nation. It is equally true, that this last issue (i.e., exclusive implementation of Islamic *shari'ah* law on the Muslim community only) has been unanimously agreed upon by the Investigating Committee for the Preparation of Independence of Indonesia (BPUPKI) in a charter called the *Piagam Jakarta* (the Jakarta Charter) on June 22, 1945.⁷ The provision is suffixed to the first *sila* (principle) of *Pancasila*, comprising controversial "seven words" which read: "*dengan kewajiban menjalankan syari'at Islam bagi pemeluknya*" (with the obligation of the Muslims to carry out and observe the Islamic *shari'ah* law). And indeed, after long and tiring debates between the two opposing mainstreams (Islamic nationalists versus secular nationalists), the draft *Piagam Jakarta* was eventually and formally endorsed by the same Committee in its last session in July 1945, as the preamble to, and the spirit of, the would-be state's basic constitution. But suddenly, just in the next morning following the Declaration of Independence, that is August 18, 1945, the Preparatory Committee for Independence of Indonesia (PPKI), on the suggestion with "unknown reason" made by Mohammad Hatta,⁸ had easily managed to nullify the Islamic provision of this historical "gentleman's agreement", i.e., to delete the controversial "seven words" mentioned above or to exclude them from the then so-called "1945 Constitution".⁹

⁶ The Preparatory Committee for Independence of Indonesia (PPKI), in its meeting on August 18, 1945, unanimously accepted the proposal by Sukarno that *Pancasila* and the so-called *Undang-undang Dasar 1945* (the 1945 Constitution) are *temporary constitution*. [See: Anshari, Saifuddin, *The Jakarta Charter of June 1945: The Struggle for An Islamic Constitution in Indonesia* (Kuala Lumpur: ABIM, 1979), p. 30]. But the subsequent political development of Indonesia to date proved otherwise, that *Pancasila* and the so-called *Undang-undang Dasar 1945* (the 1945 Constitution) have been *sacralized*, and hence considered final.

⁷ Details of the Jakarta Charter and the events surrounding it, see: Anshari, Saifuddin, *op. cit.*

⁸ According to a report made by Saifuddin Anshari, that in that meeting, Moh. Hatta did not produce any reason for his suggestion to drop the controversial "seven words". He had only managed to disclose the reason behind his suggestion in writing twenty four years later, i.e., when his book *Sekitar Proklamasi 17 Agustus 1945* was published in 1969. [See: *ibid*, pp. 30-2]. Rather, it was because of Sukarno, as the declarator of independence coupled with his decisive role as the chairman of the Preparatory Committee's meeting, who managed to persuade those favoring a state based on Islamic principles convincingly, by urging the Committee members to act "quick as lightening" (*dengan kecepatan kilat*), and not to concern themselves with details, but to pay attention only to the outline. Moreover, Sukarno added, that the Constitution was a temporary Constitution (*Undang-undang Dasar Sementara*) which in due course would be perfected by elected representatives of the people. [See *ibid*, p. 30].

⁹ K.H.M. Isa Anshary, as quoted by Anshari, terms the events that took place in the following day of the Declaration of Independence as a "clever juggling act" (*permainan sulap*). See *ibid*, p. 31.

In fact, these bitter debates on the constitution of the newly-born state of Indonesia reflect the reality of deep and sharp polarization of thoughts among the Indonesian leaders prior to the independence. In the late thirties and early forties of the last century, at least, the polarization of thoughts of whether Indonesia in the future independence period should be an Islamic state or a secular democratic state, has started emerging openly in the mass media. On the one hand, the secular nationalist group (consisting of secular Muslims, nationalists, and non-Muslims) who favored the secular state was represented by Sukarno. He saw that Indonesia is a pluralist country containing multi-religious and multi-cultural communities. Consequently, establishing Indonesian state based on Islamic *shari'ah* would mean ignoring the plurality of Indonesian religious people.¹⁰ While on the other, the Islamic nationalist group favoring the Islamic state was represented by M. Natsir who argued that Indonesia belongs to Muslims, for they are the majority of the population (with approximately 90 percent of total Indonesian people). Hence, it is their right to establish Islamic state or, at least, to apply Islamic *shari'ah* in the country.¹¹

Seen through the prolonged polemics, *Pancasila* of the Jakarta Charter version is really a *modus vivendi* and the most rational compromise between the two groups as to avoid a deadlock. And actually it is, to use Muhammad Kamal Hassan's words, "the minimal demands Muslims sought."¹² Nevertheless, since the Jakarta Charter was frankly in favour of a certain religion (even though the religion of the majority: Islam) over the other, the secular nationalists would never stop spelling out their dissatisfactions, insisting that the controversial "seven words" must be dropped, or the Jakarta Charter should be considered as null. Muslim leaders on the Preparatory Committee, because of their spirit of tolerance, on the one hand, and convinced by Sukarno's persuasive argument, on the other, kept silent and remained confident that there would be a rectification, and even a new Constitution based on Islamic principles, once the Muslims get strength and achieve majority of ballots in the coming first general elections.

However, the following years after the first general elections 1955 which did not bring victory to any one of the main streams in Indonesian society, had witnessed the continuum of sharp and exhaustive debates in the Constituent Assembly between the two main groups that had previously been competing with each-other.¹³ Eventually, with the suggestion (intervention) by the Indonesian Army, Sukarno intervened with a Presidential Decree in July 1959, in which he officially declared, among other things, *the return to the 1945 Constitution* (in which *Pancasila* is considered as the basis and spirit). This Decree had, thus, put an end not only to Muslims hopes to have, at least, an Islamically inspired Constitution in particular, but also to the blooming aspired democracy in general.

¹⁰ See Noer, Deliar, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942* (Singapore and Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 285-7.

¹¹ See *ibid*, p. 294. See more details about Natsir's religious and political view in Hefner, Robert W., *Civil Islam: Muslim and Democratization in Indonesia* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 106. See also, Hooker, M.B., *Indonesian Islam, Social Change Through Contemporary Fatawa*, (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003), pp. 30-2. For detailed accounts on the polemics between the two groups, see *ibid*, pp. 216-95.

¹² Hassan, Muhammad Kamal, *Muslim Intellectual Responses to "New Order" Modernization in Indonesia* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1982), p. 8.

¹³ The detailed account on the debates in the Constituent Assembly, see Anshari, Saifuddin, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-79; also Noer, Deliar, *Partai Islam di Pentas Nasional* (Jakarta: Grafiti Pers, 1987).

The events surrounding the independence of Indonesia up to the President's Decree of July 1959 (the formative period of independent Indonesia), as mentioned above, have clearly shown that the seed of religious pluralism was being sown and its soil being cultivated systematically.¹⁴ In other words, the discourse of religious pluralism in Indonesia has actually been born along with the birth of Indonesia. Of course, one can hardly find out the feature of the discourse pronounced explicitly by the advocates of Indonesian secular state. Not even Sukarno had ever mentioned or theorized in an explicit way that all religions are equally true. And even the Christians may have had their own parochial objectives, so that they may have not addressed the discourse directly. But one thing is extremely clear, with which they all are chiefly concerned, that the state affairs should be run democratically, far away from any religious interference. This is adequately enough to prove what I am trying to point out.

Democracy and secularism, on the one side, and pluralism in general and religious pluralism in particular, on the other, are actually two faces of the same coin. In the early Indonesian context, this fact is demonstratively visible through the systematic way leading towards the legalization of *Pancasila* as the state ideology and philosophy, or *weltanschauung*. Evidently, arguments and counter-arguments produced by the secular nationalist faction, in the Investigating Committee, the Preparatory Committee, and the Constituent Assembly, furnish this truth further. However, it has been commonly argued, in order to convince the Muslims, that the first *sila* of *Pancasila*, i.e., Belief in One Supreme God, does guarantee the state for being inseparable from religious beliefs and principles. Moreover, essentially this *sila* does not contravene the Islamic belief, rather it is in complete agreement with *tawhīd*. But, having looked at *Pancasila* closely, a critical mind would absolutely observe the vagueness and ambiguity of these five *silas* (*Pancasila*), especially the first *sila*; and would definitely say “āmīn” to what Masjkur, a Muslim member of the Constituent Assembly, said that:

The *Pancasila* is an empty formula which still needs contents. If the *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*, the first *sila* of the *Pancasila* is filled by the people who consider a stone as God, the Lordship in the *Pancasila* then will be filled in with stone. If it is filled in by tree worshippers, it will be filled with a tree.¹⁵

Of course, nobody denies that there are good ideas in *Pancasila*. Yet these good ideas defy precise definition, because they carry different meanings for different groups. From which sources does *Pancasila* want to derive its meanings or teachings? Similar remarks also had been addressed by M. Natsir in the Constituent Assembly (the legislative body formed on the basis of 1955 Elections' result). In his objection to accept *Pancasila* as the state ideology, he argued further that:

Yet the explanations given by its supporters indicate that they themselves cannot decide what are its [the *Pancasila*'s] true contents, its proper sequence, its source, its

¹⁴ If Boland's interpretation of the events leading to the President's Decree of July 1959 is correct, i.e., that the Decree to “return to the Constitution of 1945” is only a means to pave the way for Sukarno's real aim (guided democracy), so that he could thus legalize his ‘conception’, and not that he was looking for a way out of the commonly presupposed deadlock of the Constituent Assembly [see: Boland, B.J., *The Struggle of Islam in Modern Indonesia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), p. 91], it must be concluded that there must had been systematic and well-planned attempts to create an environment conducive to the emergence of the so-called pluralism.

¹⁵ Quoted in Anshari, Saifuddin, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

nucleus, and its interdependence of its components. Because these are not clear, the difficulties will then gradually increase.¹⁶

Anyway, that *Pancasila* is subject to many different interpretations is quite manifest. In this case, then, the formal interpretation by the government always takes precedence over other possible interpretations and becomes binding to all. So, in the context of the first *sila*, the idea of One Supreme God is unclear, who/what it is all about. To use Robert N. Bellah's theory of "Civil Religion in America"¹⁷ in Indonesian context, we could say with great confidence that, in fact, the only reference of the first *sila* is simply the concept of God, a word that almost all Indonesians can accept but that means so many different things to so many different people that it is almost an empty sign. Thus, to be more precise, what is really clear is that he/it is the God of pluralism.

C. YEARS OF SILENCING RELIGIOUS DISPUTES

The President's Decree of July 1959 proved to be very effective and to have far-reaching end. It has tremendously managed to silence all the subsequent attempts to introduce any amendment or change to the 1945 Constitution, including the Muslim struggles to legalize the Jakarta Charter.

Prominent to the agenda of Sukarno's "Guided Democracy" was how to manage religious harmony among all Indonesian communities and groups, so that their potencies could be united together to strengthen the country and to serve national interests. He formulated this concept, which soon developed into outright ideology, in what he called NASAKOM (*Nasionalisme, Agama, Komunisme* or Nationalism, Religion, and Communism). Of course, basically this ideology was political. And actually it was initially, according to a reliable source,¹⁸ an old thought with which Sukarno had been so much obsessed since his early stage of political struggle for Indonesian independence against the Dutch colonialism. Then, when he assumed almost unlimited power, thanks to his Presidential Decree of July 1959, he took the opportunity to translate this thought formally into a concrete reality and to forge it into becoming the state ideology under the acronym NASAKOM. Inspired by an old Javanese religious symbol, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity),¹⁹ which has actually been institutionalized as the *motto* of the newly independent state, Sukarno tried to syncretize or to blend nationalism, religion, and communism into a new form of the state ideology to suit the local conditions. Although it might appear to observers that the basic tenets of the three politico-religious concepts contain fundamental contradictions which are irreconcilable,

¹⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁷ For the details of the theory, see: Bellah, Robert N., 'Civil Religion in America', in his *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, First Paperback Printing 1991), Chapter 9, pp. 168-89.

¹⁸ See: *Catatan A. Umar Said SOAL BAHAYA DARI «CALEG BEKAS PKI»* (<http://perso.club-internet.fr/kontak/Soal%20bahaya%20dari%20Caleg%20bekas%20PKI.htm>), retrieved on 15 August 2004.

¹⁹ *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* originally appeared in a legend which can be found in a book entitled *Sutasoma*, written in old Javanese by Mpu Tantular around the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Basically it means "unity in diversity" which describes the flexibility of the Javanese people to syncretize and to blend the various religious beliefs, traditions, and cultures –some of which are conflicting in the eyes of foreigners- into one to suit local conditions.

Sukarno was tempted to give it a trial run. And though he has taken all necessary actions (including massive socialization of the ideology through the mass media, and incorporating it into the national anthem, etc.) in order to safeguard this new state ideology and to ensure its effectiveness in the life of all the nation, NASAKOM was destined to die early. It ended up on the rocks because one of the three components had tried to impose its will on the others by use of force. It had infringed the spirit of tolerance. Once the rule is broken, the balance of the scale is tipped, and the whole idea collapsed.

As far as this paper is concerned in this regard, it does not try to show whether or not NASAKOM is self-contradictory. But our main concern here is to investigate whether or not this controversial ideology was, indeed, designed primarily to settle the problem of plurality of Indonesian people. As is extremely manifest, to Sukarno, nationalism was everything. He was the nationalist *par excellence*, but at the same time he could not deny the very fact that Indonesia is religiously and culturally a pluralistic country. If this is so, then by design NASAKOM is not just simply an attempt to bring together nationalism, religion, and communism on a par, as the acronym appears to suggest at first glance, but it implies something deeper. It is a secular nationalism-based ideology that promotes the national interests only at the expense of other ideologies, especially religious ideologies. Though the Indonesian soil has a good past experience of a peaceful intermingling between the two Indian great religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, which have not been able to co-exist in their own birth place (India) so far, categorically speaking the introduction of NASAKOM officially by Sukarno to the Indonesian collective awareness was really a bold step forward to syncretize not only religions among each other, but also, for the first time, religions and secular or even atheistic ideologies and worldviews. However, given the facts that NASAKOM was designed under the Sukarno's guided democracy, it might be considered as an attempt to increase its supervision over religious and secular communities.

Meanwhile, the New Order administration of Suharto has introduced another discourse of managing religious harmony. At least, this discourse could be seen through a number of Suharto's regime policies, such as, *firstly*, the promotion of non-Muslims (Christians) to hold important posts in both the government and the Army. For instance, as soon as Suharto assumed power for the first time constitutionally, he promoted a Protestant, General Maraden Panggabean, as his successor to the army command; and the leader of the Catholic party (which polled only two per cent of the vote in the 1955 elections), Frans Seda, first as Minister of Finance and then as Minister for Communications.²⁰ It was, then, commonly held by the Muslims that by this policy, Suharto's regime was trying to pave the way for "Christianization" of Indonesia, but apparently this did not prove true. True, the Christians have, or might have, gained much from this policy. But equally true also, that the regime has managed to create equilibrium of powers, curtailing and even marginalizing the Muslims roles in the political arena, which were very dominant in the Old Order era (Sukarno's era). This fact was further accentuated with efforts which involved corporatist capture through state-charter of national-level religious institutions. In this regard, for example, Porter writes:

Thus, during the 1970s, the regime assigned religious associations as national peak bodies to channel the interests of Indonesia's five main religious communities – Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, and Buddhism- religions that were

²⁰ Polomka, Peter, *Indonesia Since Sukarno* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 188.

accorded official recognition. There was the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), the Communion of Indonesian Churches (PGI), the Indonesian Council of Bishops (MAWI), the Indonesian Association of Hindu Dharma, and the Representation of the Indonesian Buddhist Community (WALUBI).²¹

The main objectives of such a policy are very clear. It is an attempt at reorientation and guidance of religious life under the management of the state, so that it would not disrupt religio-social harmony and order.

Secondly, the commitment of the regime to maintain *Pancasila* as the state ideology, reemphasizing the President's Decree of July 1959, i.e., the return to the 1945 Constitution. This policy has been regarded commonly by observers as the renewed version of "Guided Democracy" previously introduced by the Old Order's regime of Sukarno. Hence, the main concerns of the New Order's regime were focused primarily on reorienting and reordering all walks of national life of the people as to conform to *Pancasila* (in its official interpretation by the regime, of course) democracy. This included, among other things, reorienting the national education and culture with its different forms –formal, informal, and non-formal. This is what General Ali Murtopo, one of the architects of the New Order's policies,²² called in his *Strategi Pembangunan Nasional* "the modern acculturation", saying that:

Indonesian society, nowadays, has been experiencing the process of *modern acculturation* (akulturasi modern). And this is the third acculturation, if we consider the Hindu influence as the first and then the Islamic influence as the second.²³

In the formal education, for instance, in 1978 the regime through the Minister of Education and Culture, Daoed Joesoef,²⁴ inserted the subject *Pendidikan Moral Pancasila* – PMP- (*Pancasila's* Morals Indoctrination) into the curriculum of all levels of national education, primary, secondary, and tertiary. For the first time, the Indonesian pupils and students were barely exposed through this course to the new "belief" that *all religions are the same*. Of course, the regime, then, received very strong and negative reactions from the Muslims widely, so that it was compelled to revise and amend some parts of the course.²⁵ In addition to this, the Ministry also signed a decision that enforced every student to attend the *Pancasila* (P4) indoctrination courses.

However, the compulsory attendance in this *Pancasila* (P4) indoctrination courses was not confined to the students and civil servants only, but according to the Presidential Decision No.: 10/1979, it was compulsory also to all segments of the masses without exception.

²¹ Porter, Donald J., *Managing Politics and Islam in Indonesia* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), p. 62.

²² Gen. Ali Murtopo is a Christian and among the most important and influential figures in the shaping the New Order's policy and strategy. He used his Tanah Abang-based CSIS (Centre for Strategic and International Studies) run by mostly Chinese-Catholics, as the think-tank through which the crucial government policies and strategies were born. In September 1981, he published his book *Strategi Pembangunan Nasional* which is very profound and comprehensive, covering all aspects of life of the Indonesian people as a nation. The book was, according to one of the active members of the centre, Harry Tjan, a result of his intense discussion with the members [*Editor*, 7 September 1991, p. 36].

²³ Murtopo, Ali, *Strategi Pembangunan Nasional* (Jakarta: CSIS, 2nd ed. 1982), p. 307. [Emphasis added]

²⁴ Daoed Joesoef, is a Christian and among the important members of CSIS.

²⁵ Karim, M. Rusli, *Dinamika Islam di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Hanindita, 1985), p. 49.

Thirdly, the special reorienting Islamic community and inter-religious co-existence. Given the fact that the Muslims constituted majority in the country, and that most of them were traditionalists and conservatives, the regime felt necessary to pay a special attention to them. The Ministry of Religious Affairs was supposed to play the decisive role in getting this policy done. But given the fact that this Ministry had since its establishment been dominated by the NU figures who were conservatives, the first step to be taken was to replace them with technocrats and administrators who shared the New Order's anti-party bias, its vision for a secular process of modernization, and had no background of political activism. Hence, the regime recruited Dr. Mukti Ali (a long-time department employee, a leading scholar in the educational field, and a known "moderate" with a background in the *Muhammadiyah*, graduated from McGill University, Canada, in 1957) and appointed him as the Minister of Religious Affairs in 1971.

His special attention was primarily due for reorienting the Ministry and the Islamic education, especially the tertiary institutions (the then IAINs). Here, he recruited those who had a similar background to him to hold the strategic posts. Coupled with this, he established a "McGill unit" within the department's research and development section in order to advance comparative religious studies.²⁶ So far as the reorienting Islamic education is concerned, Dr. Mukti Ali basically concentrated only on the holistic reform of tertiary institutions, entrusting it to the hand of his junior fellow, Dr. Harun Nasution, another McGill University graduate. For once the IAINs, which were widespread in at least 14 provinces of the country, were under control, they would surely provide an environment as well as human resources conducive to the will of the regime.

Indeed, soon after his appointment as the Rector of the IAIN campus in Jakarta in 1973, Harun Nasution succeeded in persuading the floor at a meeting held in Bandung in the same year, to adopt "liberal" and comparative approach into a new IAIN curriculum, so that it became roughly similar to that of the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill. As we will see later, this holistic reform of the IAINs has really achieved tremendous success in promoting and advocating religious pluralism within one generation only.

Pertaining to the regime's policy on fostering inter-religious co-existence and religious harmony, several necessary measures have been taken through the state relevant bodies and departments. For instance, as early as Suharto assumed power, he convened an "Inter-religious Consultation" on 30 November 1967, urging the necessity of tolerance and avoidance of using religious propagation as a means of proselytization.²⁷ In 1972, The Minister of Religious Affairs, Mukti Ali, initiated *Proyek Kerukunan Hidup Bersama* (Project of Religious Harmony).²⁸ In 1978, the Minister of Religious Affairs, Alamsjah Ratuperwiranegara, issued a policy statement called *tri kerukunan* (three harmonies), which

²⁶ Porter, Donald J., *op. cit.*, p. 56. This, in turn, had spread largely and quickly within the intellectual circles the issue of the so-called "McGill mafia". To look into the extent to which the issue was spreading, see: Madjid, Nurcholish, 'Belajar Islam ke Barat; Belajar Sastra Jawa ke Leiden,' in *Panji Masyarakat*, No. 490, pp. 24-5.

²⁷ The complete text of speeches by President Suharto, the Minister of Religious Affairs, K.H. Muhammad Dahlan, and the representative of the Muslims, H.M. Rasjidi, see: Natsir, M., *Islam dan Kristen di Indonesia*, edited by E.S. Anshary (Jakarta: Media Dakwah, 3rd ed., 1983), pp. 257-78. And the detailed account on the fierce debate between the Muslim and Christian representatives, which ended up without any agreement, see: Polomka, Peter, *op. cit.*, p. 184; also Boland, B.J., *op. cit.*, pp. 234-7; and Hassan, Muhammad Kamal, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

²⁸ This project was chaired by Djohan Effendi. See *Tempo*, 29 August 1992.

was an attempt at reorienting and guidance of religious life. The most important of the three harmonies was, however, the achievement of harmony between the state and religion, especially Islam.²⁹ In 1979, together with the Minister of Internal Affairs, he issued Joint Decision No. 1/1979 concerning 'Methods of Implementation of Religious Propagation and Foreign Aid to Religious Institutes in Indonesia'.³⁰ In 1988, another project of religious harmony was launched by the Minister of Religious Affairs, Munawir Sjadzali, under the name "Widia Wisata", in which representatives of all religions were joining. And in its 11th round held in Lampung in 1992, Munawir Sjadzali expressed the difficulties he had been facing in his job to harmonize the religions, but still he was very optimistic since, according to him, "religion belongs to God and the nation belongs to all [Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists]".³¹

Fourthly, and the climax, the declaration of *Pancasila* as the sole ideological foundation (*azas tunggal*) of all organizations in Indonesia. As to silence any possible dispute or resistance against the implementation of this policy the parliament passed the Law No.: 8/1985. This means enforcing *azas tunggal* on all social and political organizations, replacing all types of religious and ideological identities with *Pancasila*. In fact, a number of policies mentioned above have been taken systematically by the regime in order to pave the way for this particular objective. So by this Law, coupled with the Law No.: 18/1986 concerning the practical implementation of the previous Law No.: 8/1985, "the state administration", said Porter,

had finally legislated what have been *de facto* policy, which sought to shut off [political, ideological, or religious] parties from their lines of communication with the grassroots and provide the bureaucracy with a near monopoly over channels of representation via corporatised non-party entities.³²

Definitely these laws were not directed against religions in a straightforward manner. Nevertheless, since it is religion that usually provides a solid foundation for an organization, either social or political, the effect of these laws eventually and inevitably hit religions, because they are where the buck stops, and especially Islam which has been so far the main foundation of all Islamic socio-political organizations in Indonesia. Indirectly, religions were "forced" to content themselves with confining or reducing their jurisdictions to the private affairs of their followers only. Here, the discourse of religious pluralism is clearly manifest.

D. OPENING THE NEW CHAPTER OF THE DISCOURSE

The collapse of Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998 has opened remarkably the new chapter of, not only the history of the modern Indonesia widely known as *Era Reformasi* (the Era of Reformation), but also the discourse of religious pluralism. This latter has become possible because as soon as the military regime lost control and power, there erupted an escalation of bloody violence and conflict, most of which –if not all- was taking place in

²⁹ Porter, Donald J., *op. cit.*, p. 62.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65; also see the text of the Joint Decision: Von Denffer, Ahmad, *Indonesia: Government Decrees on Mission*, Situation Report No. 2 (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, Reprinted 1987), pp. 24-9.

³¹ *Editor*, 8 February 1992.

³² Porter, Donald J., *op. cit.*, p. 48.

religious colour and form, in different parts of the country. Regardless of the controversy on the causes of this inter-religious bloody violence and conflict, the discourse of religious pluralism in Indonesia has acquired momentous currency, with the infusion of new blood into the old stock, to develop further and reassert itself emphatically.

For the first time since independence, the discourse seems to have received such a tremendous acceptance and warm welcome – even moral acknowledgement – within the different levels and circles of society in Indonesia. This phenomenal phenomenon came into existence as a logical consequence of a series of systematic policies and strategies as mentioned above, especially concerning the reorienting national, and more specific: Islamic, education, previously enforced by the New Order government. So, it is naturally to be expected that by the era of reformation, that is, after about the period of one generation, the fruits of these policies and strategies were abundant and adequately enough to bring about a climatic change and fertile soil conducive to the discourse. Because, by then, most, if not all, of the centres of power and leadership, and the strategic posts, formal or informal, governmental or non-governmental, from the top to the bottom, through which the fate or destination of the country is decided, had been filled in and controlled by those who were the products of the said educational system.

Apart from that, the popular acceptance and currency of the discourse, in fact, has been accelerated by the unceasing efforts made by several figures, the so-called, modernist Muslim intellectuals, such as Nurcholish Madjid, Ahmad Wahib, and Djohan Effendi, who had started sowing the seeds of Islamic liberal thinking on the Indonesian soil since the seventies of the twentieth century. First of all, Nurcholish Madjid (who is considered the most prominent among them and has become the icon or symbol of liberal Islam in Indonesia) attempted with the jargon “*Islam, Yes; Partai Islam, No*” (Islam, Yes; Islamic Party, No),³³ on the one hand, to convince the Muslims that Islam has nothing to do with political affairs, and that there is no such an animal in Islam called “Islamic state”; and on the other, to provide a theological legitimacy for the political efforts made by the newly-established Suharto regime to fortify the basis of nation-state government based on *Pancasila* ideology. Later, in eighties when the regime started introducing, and then enforcing, *Pancasila* as the sole ideological foundation (*azas tunggal*) as we have seen above, he developed his particular theory of *Indonesian religious pluralism*, which was, according to him, deeply rooted in Islam. That is, since in the Qur’an, sūrah Āli ‘Imrān:64, God commands Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to seek and find out *kalimah sawā*’ (a common term) between the Muslims and People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*), Nurcholish Madjid urges the Indonesian Muslims to consider *Pancasila* as the very *kalimah sawā*’ for the Indonesian context.³⁴ Later, commenting on this Qur’anic verse, Nurcholish Madjid arbitrarily opines in his ‘Islamic Roots of Modern Pluralism: Indonesian Experiences,’ that:

³³ The jargon was devised by Nurcholish Madjid in his earlier article which was published later along with his other essays in Madjid, Nurcholish, *Islam Kemodernan dan Keindonesiaan* (Bandung: Pustaka Mizan, IV ed., 1991), pp. 204-5.

³⁴ As far as *kalimah sawā*’ is concerned, Nurcholish Madjid was, in fact, not the first to raise the importance of the issue in order, on the one hand, to ease the Muslims’ acceptance of *Pancasila* as the *azas tunggal* and to legitimize Islamically its enforcement by the government, and, on the other, to settle the inter-religious problems in Indonesia. Abdurrahman Wahid, the other prominent liberal Islam, actually has coined the issue of *Pancasila* as common platform (though he did not relate it with *kalimah sawā*’) for the Indonesians long before Nurcholish Madjid. [See: *Suara Karya*, 20 May 1985].

Yet it is always possible that the adherents of different religions could agree on a set of common terms that includes more values than the one of monotheism alone. Further the more values that the adherents of different religions agree to be common terms, the better. ... To have not one but five subjects as common terms between different religions or factions, as is the case with *Pancasila* for Indonesian people, is better than to have just one subject.

Thus *Pancasila* becomes a firm basis for the development of religious tolerance and pluralism in Indonesia.³⁵

Moreover, *Pancasila* is, according to him, absolutely analogous in spirit to the political document created by the Prophet for the people of Medina soon after he arrived at the city in *hijrah* from Mecca, which is known later as *Ṣaḥīfat* or *Dustūr al-Madīnah* (the Constitution of Medina).³⁶

It is extremely important to note that this kind of liberal theological legitimacy has shown a tremendous impact on both the regime and the Muslims. On the one hand, the regime felt reserving the right legally and theologically to exercise any measure, even the severest and cruelest one, against any one or group who challenges the policy of *aḡas tunggal*.³⁷ And on the other hand, the Muslims, especially those who are among the secular elite and educated Muslims, took it for granted as it happens to accord them legitimacy and endorsement of their secular understanding of Islam, or their secular ways of being Muslims so far. Thus today, it is no wonder that one can observe succinctly the rampant discourse of religious pluralism within the different layers of Indonesian society. New socio-religious values and norms have replaced the old ones, and have changed the people's way of life considerably to such an extent that in the past it was totally *taboo* –and hence, condemned– to talk about the plurality of religious truth, but conversely, nowadays it is considered *taboo*, obsolete –and even more pejoratively, fundamentalism, extremism, and radicalism– to defend the exclusive truth of one's religion (Islam, for instance). The championship and advocacy of religious pluralism in Indonesia now are no longer the monopoly of governmental institutions and bodies, but the socio-religious organizations, such as the two most influential Islamic organizations (respectively *Nahdat al-'Ulamā'* and *Muḥammadiyyah*), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as *JIL* (Liberal Islam Network), *LKieS*, *Desantara*, *Islam Emansipatoris*, have rather been taking over the responsibility for, or at least taking part actively in, the success of the campaign. This situation is probably what has been rightly impressed by Leith Kubba, an Iraqi intellectual who directs an influential Islamic

³⁵ Madjid, Nurcholish, 'Islamic Roots of Modern Pluralism: Indonesian Experiences,' in *Studia Islamika* 1 (1) (April-June 1994), pp. 63-4.

³⁶ -----, 'Cita-cita Politik Kita', in Carvallo, Bosco and Dasrizal (eds), *Aspirasi Umat Islam Indonesia* (Jakarta: LEPPENAS, 1983), pp. 10-1; his *Khilafah dan Perkembangannya* (Jakarta: Nuansa, 1984), pp. 29-31; also his *Islam Kemodernan dan Keindonesiaan*, pp. 73-4. But later, it seems that this opinion is not purely his own. Because he himself makes mention in one of his articles that Adam Malik, then the Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia, is the authority of this view. [See -----, 'Islamic Roots of Modern Pluralism: Indonesian Experiences,' p. 64].

³⁷ The tragedy against humanity in Tanjung Priok, the Northern part of Jakarta, in September 1984, in which according to the formal report more than thirty Muslims lost their lives (and according to the informal report, the number of the killed was around 300 people) and hundreds were severely wounded [see: *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 2 July 1987, p. 41], is an ample evidence of this rampant impact. But then it is deplorable, indeed, that neither Nurcholish Madjid nor Abdurrahman Wahid has staged any protest when *aḡas tunggal* was abolished by the parliament in the reformation era recently.

Foundation in London, as he remarks: “*When I travel to Syria and Iraq I feel that I see Islam’s past, but when I travel to Indonesia, I feel that I see its future.*”³⁸

It was the onslaught of this culturally and “religiously” pluralistic climate that clouded over the other constitutional struggle of some Indonesian Islamic parties recently for the reintroduction of *Piagam Jakarta* (the Jakarta Charter) in the era of reformation. Of course, all the old elements of anti-*Piagam Jakarta* still remained intact, but what was considerably observed as a new phenomenon was the widespread and strong resistance of the above-mentioned socio-religious organizations and NGOs, most of which, if not all, claim their basic identities with Islam. For instance, formal and informal statements made by the most prominent figures of the two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, such as Hasyim Muzadi (the chairman of *Nahdlat al-‘Ulamā*), Abdurrahman Wahid (the previous chairman of *Nahdlat al-‘Ulamā*), Ahmad Syafi’i Ma’arif (the chairman of *Muhammadiyah*), and M. Amin Ra’is (the previous chairman of *Muhammadiyah*), as reported publicly by various mass media were sternly against the legalization of the Jakarta Charter, that is, the inclusion of the “controversial seven words” into chapter 29 of the 1945 Constitution. In contrast, they have become an active part of the campaigning agents of religious pluralism in Indonesia today. Recently, an activist of *Muhammadiyah* wrote in a newspaper, echoing what has been already said by Nurcholish Madjid repeatedly,³⁹ that:

...let’s declare afresh that religious pluralism is *sunnatullah* (the law of God), which is immutable. We, as Muslims, have no choice other than to accept religious pluralism positively and optimistically as the law of God.⁴⁰

Therefore, according to the writer and the likes, the Muslims must accept the doctrine of religious pluralism. And whosoever stands otherwise, he/she is subject to the charge of being anti-*sunnatullah*, anti-pluralism, anti-democracy, intolerant, fundamentalist, extremist and so on and so forth.

Meanwhile, various books, booklets, journals, magazines, pamphlets, etc., published by these organizations have been directed massively to serve the same end also. The foreign-funded journal *Taṣwīr al-Afḳār* (published by LAKPESDAM, NU) and *TANWIR* (published by PSAP, Muhammadiyah), for example, are among the most eloquent voice of the issues pertaining to the discourse of religious pluralism. The journal *TANWIR*, in its edition no. 2, vol. 1, July 2003, for instance, has included articles all of which are specifically dealing with the issue of religious pluralism.⁴¹

The global issues of religious (Islamic) fundamentalism, extremism, radicalism, and terrorism, especially after the 9/11 tragedy (September 11, 2001) of WTC twin tower in USA, followed by the serial bombings in Indonesia (Bali in 2002, Hotel Marriott in 2003 and most recently in the front of Australian Embassy in Jakarta in September 9, 2004 –and hence known as the 9/9 tragedy), have undoubtedly contributed also to further acceleration of the peoples’ cry for an instant solution. Hence the eyes would easily turn to the apparently

³⁸ Reported by Robert W. Hefner in his ‘Modernity and the Challenge of Pluralism: Some Indonesian Lessons,’ in *Studia Islamika*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1995), p. 41.

³⁹ For instance, see Madjid, Nurcholish, *Islam Doktrin dan Peradaban*, (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1995), lxxvii.

⁴⁰ *Jawa Pos*, 11 January 2004.

⁴¹ See: Jurnal *TANWIR*, edition 2, vol. 1, July 2003. This journal is co-published by the Center for Study of Religion and Civilization (PSAP, *Muhammadiyah*) and The Asia Foundation.

tolerant ways of being religious, or precisely the religious pluralism, advocated by those liberal thinkers.

E. CONCLUSION

Ever since independence, Indonesia has been experiencing a critical transition, slowly but surely, to approaching a “real democratic” state –a state where all the people stand on an equal footing irrespective of the colour, ethnicity, race, and religion. Here, lies the importance of the discourse of religious pluralism. This is so, because religious pluralism is theoretically and practically considered as a *conditio sine qua non* for establishing a nation-state based on democracy.

Thus, the discourse of religious pluralism is by no means a religious or theological discourse proper, but, to be precise, is a political discourse. At least, this is evidently what has been empirically experienced in the Indonesian context. As clearly observed, the notion of religious pluralism has been developed out of a socio-political reality, and not out of theological discourse. It is the ideology of nation-state based on “the *Pancasila* democracy” that gave birth to the flourishing religious pluralism in Indonesia, and not *vice-versa*. Hence, the state, in fact, has created its own new religion, called “Civil Religion”, analogous to the one that has been well-theorized by Robert N. Bellah in his “Civil Religion in America”.⁴² This, in fact, evidently confirmed further the theory of “varieties of civil religion” co-developed by him and Phillip E. Hammond.⁴³ Indonesian “Civil Religion” may differ in detail from that of America, but the essence and principle of the two remain the same, especially in terms of apotheosizing the political life of the nation and considering it as above everything and transcendent.

⁴² See the footnote 17 above.

⁴³ See the theory in detail: Bellah, Robert N., and Hammond, Phillip E., *Varieties of Civil Religion* (San Fransisco: Harper & Row, 1980).